

Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety Among Students at Private Universities in Erbil

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Abstract

Education is often regarded as an effective means of guiding students in the process of altering their behavior to conform to the standards of both themselves and the expectations of society. Both students' anxiety and their attitudes toward learning are seen as essential elements of the educational process; as a consequence, both factors play an important part in the development of second language skills. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the factors that cause students attending private institutions in Erbil to experience anxiety when they are studying a foreign language. A quantitative study approach was used to quantify the students' anxiety, and the factors that were taken into consideration were fear of receiving a negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and exam anxiety. The researcher was successful in collecting the necessary data after adapting and modifying a survey that had been established by previous academics. The researcher was successful in collecting 92 surveys that had all of the required fields filled out. Using multiple regression analysis, each of the study hypotheses could be evaluated. The findings of this research showed that a student's fear of experiencing negative anxiety was related to a greater level of anxiety when it came to the process of learning a new language, but a student's fear of performing poorly on a test was related to a lower value, among other factors.

Keywords— Language Learning, Anxiety, Private Universities, Kurdistan

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of education as an important instrument for supporting students in modifying their behavior in accordance with their needs and the expectations of society is gaining widespread support (Boudreau et al., 2018). Because anxiety and attitude are viewed as essential aspects of education among students, they play an important part in the development of a student's ability to learn a second language (Teimouri et al., 2019). Because it is the language that divides the powerful members of society from the rest of the population, the English language plays an important part in many countries across the world (Chou, 2018).

The process of becoming fluent in English is one that is difficult and demanding (Zheng and Cheng, 2018). Every single individual who is learning a foreign language experience something new that has the ability to alter their entire identity (Tridinanti, 2018). As a consequence of this, successful language learning requires wholehearted commitment, great focus (Mokhtar, 2020), and the ability to effectively regulate one's emotions (Dewaele and Alfawzan, 2018). The fact that there are other additional factors to consider makes the process of learning a second

language considerably more difficult. Anxiety over one's ability to communicate in one's target language is one of the numerous variables that might affect one's rate of language acquisition (Dewaele et al., 2019). Anxiety is something that many people who are learning English go through as they move along in the process of acquiring the language. Even though the intensity of how foreign language learners feel differs from student to student, one thing that cannot be denied is the role that anxiety plays in the process (Sevinç and Dewaele, 2018). It is possible that some students will find learning English as a second language to be a challenging and tough endeavor. According to the findings of Talim et al. 2021, more than half of those who are learning a second language experience some type of anxiety. Students of a second language who suffer from anxiety may discover that studying that language is less enjoyable, and they may be aware of how their performance is affected by their worry. Because most Kurdish students do not have the opportunity to interact with native speakers of English outside of the classroom, English is considered to be an essential language for many Kurdish students (Ozer and Altay, 2021).

Anxiety is a fundamental problem that has to be addressed in personality theories (Jiang and Dewaele, 2019). Since the early 1970s, academic study in the field of learning languages other than one's native tongue has focused on the topic of anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2019). On the other hand, it is still considered to be a challenging psychological issue. In light of the aforementioned, the goal of this investigation is to investigate the factors that lead to anxious feelings in people who are learning a second or foreign language (Jin and Dewaele, 2018). There are a lot of different strategies that teachers use in the classroom in order to pick up on the anxiousness of the pupils they are trying to reach (Lee and Drajerati, 2019).

In spite of the fact that we are all familiar with the concept of anxiety and have encountered varied degrees of unpredictability and nervousness in a variety of facets of our lives, anxiety continues to be a nebulous concept that is hard to explain (Piniel and Albert, 2018). Anxiety is a component of the affective domain, which focuses on the emotional facets of human behavior and is concerned with the human experience (De Smet et al., 2018).

People who suffer from anxiety describe it as a distressing sensation that makes them feel constricted, vulnerable, and powerless in the face of potential danger (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021). Students in Kurdistan are required to keep up with their day-to-day activities and attend all of their classes in order to fulfill the academic requirements that have been set for them. Students may have the opportunity to devote more time and interest to the study of the English language if it is recognized as a significant world language. This recognition should be accorded to the English language. Additionally (Dewaele, 2019), schools must provide children with the opportunity to learn English through the development of their reading, writing, and speaking skills, in addition to providing students with the chance to improve their particular language talents (Teimouri et al., 2022). Because it is utilized as a medium of instruction in the English language departments of a number of different private institutions (Boudreau et al., 2018), the English language plays an essential role in the overall educational system. Even though many children started learning English in elementary school, kindergarten, or even day care, a significant number of those children are unable to reach an adequate level of English proficiency. The primary reason for this is a lack of motivation on the part of students at all educational levels. The acquisition of a second language is a potent instrument that may assist students in modifying their conduct to conform with their goals and the norms of their respective societies (Teimouri et al., 2019).

Attitude is viewed as a significant factor in language acquisition since the level of comfort experienced by

students is such a crucial component of the educational process (Chou, 2018). It is anticipated that elements such as selecting and reading the proper content, interacting with a native English speaker, and other similar activities would impact the attitude toward the process of learning English (Zheng and Cheng, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Over the past several decades, there has been a meteoric rise in the number of people studying English as a second language or a foreign language (Tridinanti, 2018). As the number of individuals interested in learning a language, particularly English as a second or foreign language, continues to rise, it is more important than ever to pinpoint the factors that might impede language acquisition. In particular, English as a second or foreign language (Dewaele and Alfawzan, 2018). Anxiety among language learners has not gotten a considerable amount of attention since the emergence of a constellation of variables that adversely influence second language learning (Mokhtar, 2020).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anxiety in Language Learning

When it comes to learning a foreign language, many studies have been conducted in the past to investigate the many factors that might lead to feelings of anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2019). Learner variables and situational factors make up the two primary categories that these components are often organized into. Learners are influenced by a number of factors, including their mindsets, levels of self-confidence, ages, races, personalities, genders, and levels of motivation (Sevinç and Dewaele, 2018). On the other side, situational conditions put "social interactions, course activities, course materials, education providers' conduct, and course level" in jeopardy (Ozer and Altay, 2021).

The aforementioned factors interact with one another in a variety of ways, generating and increasing the amount of anxiety that is experienced by students of foreign languages (Dewaele et al., 2019). According to Jiang and Dewaele (2019), the distinction between facilitative anxiety and debilitating anxiety shows the link between language and anxiety accomplishment. Although anxiety may have some positive effects, research conducted by a large number of academics has shown that there is frequently a negative association between language and anxiety achievement among a large number of language learners of foreign languages. Many students who are taking classes in a foreign language are having difficulties

in the classroom as a result of their anxiety (Akkaş et al., 2020).

Anxiety is widely recognized as one of the most significant aspects of the process of learning a foreign language (Jin and Dewaele, 2018). Anxiety about language is distinct from anxiety about other topics or topics in general. According to Lee and Dražati (2019), anxiety related to language learning is unique from all other forms of anxiety. The majority of people who are learning a language have shown that they struggle with anxiety, which causes them to feel uneasy while they are in a classroom environment studying a language. According to Piniel and Albert (2018), language anxiety is rather common among those who are learning a second language, and it can result in a variety of problems. As a result, children learning a second language or a language from another country should not be made to feel anxious about the language they are learning, as this would make the learning process more efficient. According to research conducted by De Smet et al. (2018), the efficacy and efficiency of the language learning process decrease when students' levels of language anxiety increase (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021). In order to determine how a student is learning a language, the most efficient technique is to conduct a survey. Students might not be able to recall or comprehend the strategies that they have learned in the past or that have been used by teachers in the past, in addition to the method descriptions that are provided in the survey sections (Dewaele, 2019). As a direct consequence of this, a number of studies have developed questionnaires based on the most recent assignments that students have finished. It would appear that if only a small amount of time has passed, pupils will be more accurate in delivering the appropriate response to the survey that should be given (Teimouri et al., 2022).

Students utilize language learning as a method or an instrument to perform learning activities that are based on their language abilities, such as writing, listening, reading, and speaking. Language learning may be classified as either a strategy or an instrument (Boudreau et al., 2018). For instance, Boonkongsan (2012) defined learning as "cognitive abilities, behaviors, plans, habits, stages, and learning skills accepted by the learner during the learning processes." The author also emphasized that the utilization of strategies would be helpful in boosting learner self-sufficiency.

According to Teimouri et al. (2019), the term "language process" refers to the methods that are used to solve difficulties that arise throughout the process of learning a second language. According to Chou (2018), the learning language process is the mechanism via which a learner acquires, recalls, and keeps new skills and information.

The process of learning a language may be defined as "any combination of methods, phases, or routines adopted by the learner to permit the attainment, storage, recovery, and use of knowledge," according to Zheng and Cheng (2018). According to Jamal et al. 2021, learning language processes are overall actions and sentiments that learners utilize when learning to assist them in remembering and retaining new information and expertise. According to Chamot and Malley (1990), learning language processes are "special views or behaviors that learners deploy in order to help them acquire, remember, or recall new knowledge and information." As a consequence of this, learning strategies are now referred to as "unique techniques of managing knowledge that improve and recall understanding" (Mokhtar, 2020), and they may be characterized as "learning or retaining information." When previous explanations of the process of language learning concentrated on learning materials and behaviors that replicated unobservable cognitive techniques, definitions finally provided a better understanding of how language learners thought and performed while they were acquiring the language (Tridinanti, 2018).

Furthermore, (Sorguli et al. 2021) defined learning language as "actions and techniques that are consciously selected by learners and may lead to activities taken to improve the learning or use of a second language through the storing, maintenance, recall, and application of information about that language through the storing (Dewaele and Alfawzan, 2018), maintenance, recall, and application of information about that language (Dewaele et al., 2019).

According to Filza and Tahira (2013), the process of learning vocabulary through language may be characterized as any activity that has an effect on this extremely broad process (Abdullah et al. 2021). At this time, there has been a significant shift in focus from a provider-dominated style of vocabulary acquisition to a student-centered style of vocabulary learning. The traditional technique for education providers in terms of vocabulary teaching has been assessed on a regular basis (Ozer and Altay, 2021), and among other things, the importance of the pupil's involvement and participation in the process has been highlighted (Sevinç and Dewaele, 2018). The key point of contention in this debate has been that pupils are rarely motivated to do what they can on their own to improve their vocabulary and other skills. Instead, students rely on educational institutions to offer whatever learning they require. According to Ali and Anwar (2021), teaching second-language students to learn vocabulary is a difficult task. Recently, it has been widely assumed that assigning a secondary role to a pupil will commonly result in a setback in vocabulary development.

In order to be effective in their vocabulary learning, students should focus on the key problem and work hard (Dewaele et al., 2019). Have a hands-on experience with the learning activities. One of the most important things is to encourage kids to take on more tasks and take more responsibility for their learning, to increase their vocabulary, and to have more influence over their everyday activities and behaviors (Jiang and Dewaele, 2019). Another advantage of such a strategy, according to Ali (2014), is that it will help satisfy child needs by allowing the child to choose and concentrate on the linguistic components that best satisfy their needs. Many studies, according to Lowrence and Lawrence (2013), have demonstrated the importance of encouraging children to develop their own technique for coping with new vocabulary rather than simply memorizing the meanings of particular words. Another way, according to Akkaş et al. (2020), is to pay more attention to the vocabulary learning tactics of the students using research-based methodologies for language expansion. Students employ a range of ways to deal with new languages, but only a few are more effective than others at extending their strategic resources in a way that is acceptable to them (Jin and Dewaele, 2018).

According to Eren (2012), a variety of social and psychological characteristics, as well as the learners' attitude toward learning a second language, have an impact on their capacity. Baker focused on the importance of the research into the deleterious effects of anxiety on language learning (Lee and Drajiati, 2019). Andavar et al. (2020) argued the importance of the affective component and its effect on language learning behavior, which leads to a decrease in students' anxiety in the classroom. The main reason for the importance of affective components such as values, interests, and attitude of students in affecting future behavior is the importance of affective components such as values, interests, and attitude of students (Piniel and Albert, 2018). This explains why it is important to pay attention to students' positive attitudes toward language acquisition, as a favorable attitude will have a good impact on students' future learning (De Smet et al., 2018).

Students' capability, strategy, and attitude, according to Anwar and Balcioglu (2016), determine their language learning success. According to Riasati (2011), students' capacity to acquire a second language is influenced not only by their language and mental abilities but also by their views and ideas towards the target language. They also stated that students' perceptions of attitudes can improve the entire language acquisition process by triggering pupils' beliefs and behaviors toward the target language, its society, and its culture (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021), as well as classifying their likelihood to

acquire the target language. Salehi and Marfet (2014) proposed a theoretical model that emphasized the importance of accompanying attitudinal research in the field of language learning (Dewaele, 2019).

Teimouri et al. (2022) has shown that language teachers, scholars, and students should notice that pupils who have a good attitude and are motivated to study a language are more likely to succeed (Boudreau et al., 2018). As a result, if a student lacks the proclivity and attention to study the target language in order to communicate with others, he or she will develop a negative attitude about language learning and will not be encouraged or enthusiastic about it. As a result, students' attitudes may play a role in language learning, as they may have an impact on their ability to achieve the desired language (Teimouri et al., 2019).

According to Gardner, "inspiration reflects the merger of power and aspiration to achieve the goal of learning the language and good attitudes toward language acquisition." (Chou, 2018) described attitude as a component of inspiration in language learning. He believes that simple predispositions and personality characteristics, such as the pupil's general attitude toward foreigners, and, on the other hand, the aimed language in particular, generalized attitudes and motivations for learning generalized attitudes, classify motivation to learn a foreign language. (Zheng and Cheng, 2018).

Foreign Language Anxiety

Students' unfavorable attitudes about learning a foreign language, such as English, have a detrimental impact on their ability to acquire the language, making the process of learning a foreign language, such as English, difficult and complex (Tridinanti, 2018). An individual's complex of feelings, beliefs, behavior, and self-perceptions in the language learning classroom as a result of variances in the language learning process is what Mokhtar (2020) referred to as "foreign language anxiety." As a consequence of this, FLA may have a negative effect on individuals who are learning a language and may cause the process of learning English as a whole to be slowed down. Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) discovered three different forms of anxiety that are connected with learning English: exam anxiety, fear of receiving a negative assessment, and communication apprehension. Nevertheless, Dewaele et al. (2019) found four factors: worry around English class, anxiety regarding tests, fear of receiving a poor assessment, and uncertainty regarding communication. Generally speaking, a lack of English language skill is the cause of some English learners' discomfort in the classroom or when practicing their English language, as well as concerns over their capacity to communicate in

English (Sevinç and Dewaele, 2018). When it comes to their oral activities in the classroom as an examination or a test instead of enhancing their English language skills, particularly in their speaking, English language learners who are experiencing test anxiety toward the English language process, particularly when it comes to their oral activities in the classroom as an examination or a test, may look at and review their own mistakes as a risk to their identity. While English language learners who are afraid of being graded negatively may see their own mistakes as a threat to their identity (Ozer and Altay, 2021).

Reactions to language anxiety can have a physical impact on language learners, such as the inability to replicate the inflection and rhythm of the language, thereby distorting individuals' sounds, as well as a cognitive impact, such as forgetting certain phrases or words while practicing the English language that was just learned. The physical and cognitive effects of language anxiety can vary from person to person (Dewaele et al., 2019). In addition, Lian and Mardziah (2014) found that dry mouth, weak knees, nausea, and sweating are all considered human symptoms that are connected with linguistic anxiety. In addition, it has been hypothesized that a sizeable proportion of individuals who experience anxiety when learning a language are unsatisfied as a direct result of their inability to communicate effectively in English and that this dissatisfaction is the root cause of English language anxiety. In addition, according to Jiang and Dewaele, (2019), learners' reactions can be broken down into two categories: psychological and physical. These categories include the following human reactions, listed from most common to least common: stuttering, trembling voice, failing to recall familiar words, pale face, faster heart beats, feeling embarrassed, red face, unconscious behaviors, being annoyed, and being annoyed (Akkaş et al., 2020).

Factors of Foreign Language Anxiety

Certain academic experts have discovered that an individual's anxiety levels rise when they are unable to communicate effectively in either English or any other second language. According to the findings of (Jin and Dewaele, 2018), English language learners who reported higher levels of anxiety also reported lower levels of skill in speaking English. In addition, if you focus an excessive amount of attention on the intonation and pronunciation of English, you could experience anxiety. According to the findings of Sabir et al. 2021, there are five factors that contribute to an increase in anxiety in English classrooms. These factors include the fear of failing in the English classroom or personally, discomfort when learners speak to a native English speaker, negative self-assessment, speech anxiety, and having negative attitudes toward

learning English in the classroom. Lee and Drajati, (2019) also identified a number of factors that can cause anxiety in students in the classroom. These factors include concerns about intelligibility, a lack of vocabulary, a lack of a conducive FL speaking environment, fear of losing face, a lack of oral practice, a fear of speaking FL with others, test anxiety, a fear of making mistakes, poor FL proficiency (Piniel and Albert, 2018), trait anxiety, and having excessive self-consciousness. According to De Smet et al. (2018), English language learners have also recorded instructional methods, personal goals, prior experience, and instructor temperament as important variables.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in Erbil, which is located in Kurdistan, with a particular emphasis on private universities. The present study included 92 students who were enrolled in the English Department at private institutions around Kurdistan, with a focus on Erbil. The children represented the second, third, and fourth grades, respectively, in their respective classes. The student population ranged in age from 18 to 30 years old. In addition, aspects such as the learner's gender were taken into consideration in order to identify any potential variations in their degree of anxiety.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was established by Horwitz et al. (1986), was used in this study to evaluate the levels of anxiety associated with learning a foreign language as well as the factors that contributed to this anxiety (FLA). The FLCAS is comprised of 33 items, each of which uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to evaluate respondents' levels of anxiety in language classroom settings. Horwitz et al. (1986) results validated the FLCAS's dependability. A quantitative approach was taken in order to collect the pertinent information for the inquiry into the aspects that learners feel contribute to the anxiety they experience when attempting to learn a foreign language, namely the English language. The activities of creating, collecting, and analyzing data are the activities that are included in methods. Primary data were collected for the study by the researcher in the form of questionnaires that were sent to participants. The data required for conducting the research were collected from recent academic articles, books, and previous studies related to the students' language anxiety and its factors in learning a foreign language. A questionnaire was prepared and distributed to students of the English Department at private universities.

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a negative impact of students' fear of negative evaluation on learning language achievement.

H2: There is a negative impact of communication apprehension on learning language achievement.

H3: There is a negative impact of test anxiety on learning language achievement.

IV. FINDINGS

The researcher employed SPSS version 28 to measure the developed research hypotheses as mentioned earlier.

Table 1: Reliability analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Fear of negative evaluation	.740	10
Communication apprehension	.819	11
Test anxiety	.749	11
Language learning	.758	14

As for reliability analysis, the main purpose is to measure the reliabilities of each item used to measure students' anxiety towards learning language in private universities. Moreover, the researcher employed three independent variables and a dependent variable to be measured which it was language learning. However, it was found that (as seen in Table 2) the Cronbach's Alpha for factor (fear of negative evaluation) = .740 which is greater than .7 this reveals that the 10 items employed to measure fear of negative evaluation were reliable for the current study, the Cronbach's Alpha for factor (communication

apprehension) = .819 which is greater than .7 this reveals that the 11 items employed to measure communication apprehension were reliable for the current study, the Cronbach's Alpha for factor (test anxiety) = .749 which is greater than .7 this reveals that the 11 items employed to measure test anxiety were reliable for the current study, and finally, the Cronbach's Alpha for factor (language learning) as dependent variable = .758 which is greater than .7 this reveals that the 14 items employed to measure language learning were reliable for the current study.

Table 2-Correlation analysis

		Fear negative evaluation	communication apprehension	Test anxiety	Language learning
Fear negative evaluation	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	92			
Communication apprehension	Pearson Correlation	.767**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	92	92		
Test anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.657**	.456**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001		
	N	92	92	92	
Language learning	Pearson Correlation	.701**	.629**	.601**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

	N	92	92	92	92
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As for correlation analysis, the main aim is to measure the association between independent variable and dependent variable, as mentioned earlier that the researcher employed three independent variables and a dependent variable. The researcher aim to measure the association between each independent variable and dependent variable, however it was found that the Pearson correlation value between students' fear of negative evaluation and language learning = .701** Sig. (2-tailed)=.000, this reveals that there is a strong correlation between students' fear of negative evaluation and language learning in private universities in Kurdistan, the Pearson correlation value between students' communication apprehension and language learning =

.629** Sig. (2-tailed)=.000, this reveals that there is a moderate correlation between students' communication apprehension and language learning in private universities in Kurdistan, and finally, the Pearson correlation value between students' test anxiety and language learning = .601** Sig. (2-tailed)=.000, this reveals that there is a moderate correlation between students' test anxiety and language learning in private universities in Kurdistan. However, the result of correlation analysis revealed (as seen in Table 2) that there are positive correlation between independent variables and dependent variable.

Table 4: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	P-Value
		B	Std. Error		
1 (Constant)		.794	.172	4.606	.000
	Fear of negative evaluation	.373	.150	2.489	.015
	Communication apprehension	.229	.101	2.268	.026
	Test anxiety	.272	.096	2.834	.006
	R Value	.552			
	F value	36.138			
a. Dependent Variable: language learning					

The researcher employed multiple regression analysis to measure the developed research hypotheses. The results revealed that (as seen in Table 3) the value *B* for the students' fear of negative evaluation = .373 which greater than .005 along with P-value = .015 this means that there is a negative impact of students' fear of negative evaluation on learning language achievement, however students' fear of negative evaluation will cause an anxiety towards learning language which is considered as one of the barrier that students are facing during the process of language learning, the value *B* for the students' communication apprehension = .229 which greater than .005 along with P-value = .026 this means that there is a negative impact of students' communication apprehension on learning language achievement, however students' communication apprehension will cause an anxiety towards learning language which is considered as a barrier that students are facing during the process of language learning, and finally, the value *B* for the students' test

anxiety = .272 which greater than .006 along with P-value = .015 this means that there is a negative impact of students' test anxiety on learning language achievement, however students' test anxiety will cause an anxiety towards learning language which is considered as one of the barrier that students are facing during the process of language learning.

V. CONCLUSION

This research pointed out the importance of English in undergraduate students in Kurdistan. The researcher examined variables influencing students' level of anxiety in Kurdistan and particularly in Erbil city. The researcher employed three variables to be investigated; these variables are (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety). A quantitative method was employed to analyze and measure factors affecting students' anxiety in language learning of private universities in Kurdistan. The researcher employed

multiple regression analysis to measure the developed research hypotheses. The results revealed that the highest value was for the students' fear of negative evaluation which indicates that there is a negative impact of students' fear of negative evaluation on learning language achievement. However students' fear of negative evaluation will cause an anxiety towards learning language which is considered as one of the barrier that students are facing during the process of language learning. The second highest value causing students' anxiety in language learning was communication apprehension which indicates that there is a negative impact of students' communication apprehension on learning language achievement. However, students' communication apprehension will cause an anxiety towards learning language which is considered as a barrier that students are facing during the process of language learning. Communication apprehension factor is the second highest influential factor that causes anxiety; students are lack of confidence while practicing language during their foreign language classes, furthermore, student's nervousness while practising their foreign language with a native speaker, and finally, the lowest value was for test anxiety. However the result reveals that there is a negative impact of students' test anxiety on learning language achievement.

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